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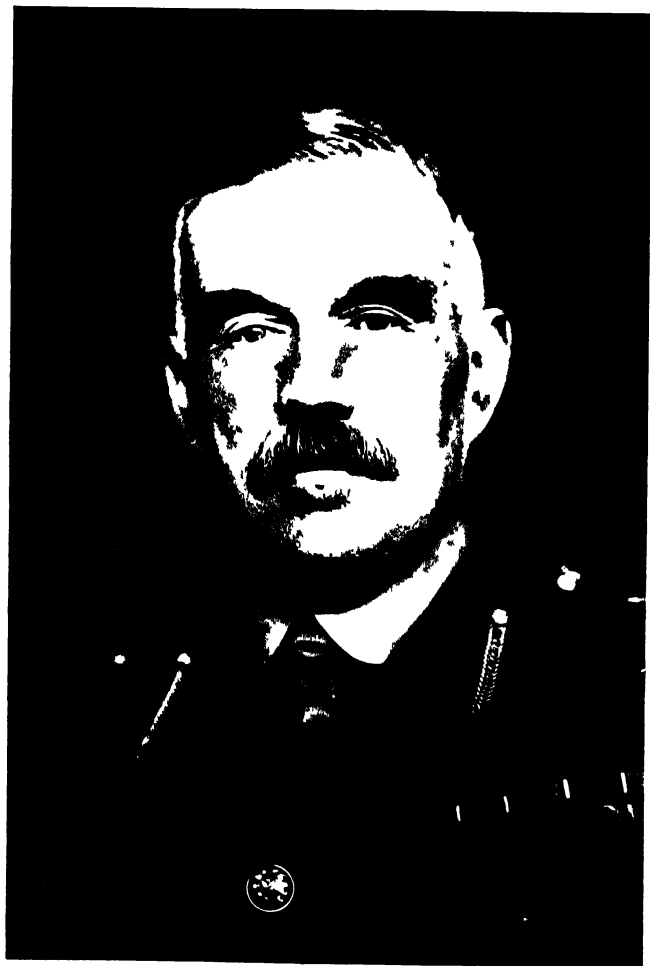
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LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM R. ROBERTSON

# The Marne—and After

*A Companion Volume to "The Retreat from Mons"*

BY

A. CORBETT-SMITH

*(Major R.F.A.)*

WITH PLATES AND MAPS

*Awake remembrance of these valliant dead,  
And with your puissant arm renew their feats :  
You are their heir.*

CASELL AND COMPANY, LTD  
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne  
1917

**First published *September* 1917**  
***Reprinted September* 1917**

**To  
The Immortal Memory  
of  
The Men of the Old Army  
who  
Saved England,  
August—November, 1914.**





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## PROLOGUE

### THE MEN OF MONS

*WHO shall sing the Song of them,  
The wonder and the strength of them,  
The gaiety and tenderness  
They bore across the sea?  
In every heart's the Song of them,  
The debt that England owes to them,  
The chivalry and fearlessness  
That strove—and won Her free.*

Merrily aboard at Southampton Quay  
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together),  
Southerly away to the dip of the sea—  
(Hey ! for a holiday in August weather)  
Far to the north the grey ships ride,  
But abeam steals a T.B.D. for a guide  
'Till they're safely along the French quay-side—  
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together).

Cheerily ashore by Rouen Quay  
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together),  
As proudly welcoming France flings free  
Her gates, aglow in the golden weather.  
"God speed!" rings the cry: and with melodies gay  
Echoing down the flower-strewn way,  
Blithesome as children sped to their play  
Go the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.

# Prologue

On to the drab-grey Belgian land,  
    With jingle of steel and creak of leather,  
Swings into line the jocund band  
    Of Horse and Guns and Foot together.  
Away in advance an outpost screen  
Of Chetwode's Cavalry intervene ;  
While flushed with pride, or coldly serene  
    The marshalling armies press together.

And now while bells yet knoll to prayer,  
    Or ever the Host is raised on high,  
A sterner summons blasts the air  
    In dread presage that Death is nigh.  
Swift overhead in an endless stream  
With ghastly wailing the great shells scream,  
To plunge the world in a hideous dream  
    Of murderous carnage and misery.

Hour after hour the raging storm  
    Crashes o'er Guns and Foot together ;  
Hour upon hour the ranks re-form—  
    (Hey ! what a game for the holiday weather !)  
Out to the flanks the Horse press home  
Charge after charge—as the sea-waves comb  
And lash the cliffs in eddying foam—  
    (So work Guns, Foot and Horse together).

Lurid in flame falls the August night  
    (Shattered the trench and battered the gun),  
Yet hurled in vain is the German might,  
    Scarce a yard of the ground is won.  
But harsh is the Fate which aid assigns  
To the enemy ranks as his power declines,  
And cleaves a road through the stern-held lines  
    Ere the pale mists rise to the morning sun.

# Prologue

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Blinded, bloody, and torn, they reel  
    (The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together)  
Back from the line of glinting steel  
    They have held through the hours of holiday weather.  
Yet hearts beat high, though hands may clench  
In the sinister whisper, "Betrayed—by the French?"  
As wistful they turn from the derelict trench  
    The Horse, Foot and Guns have held together.

So it's Southward Ho! for the land of France,  
    Through the shimmering haze of the August weather;  
"And it's we who'll pipe for a merry, mad dance,"  
    Say the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.  
"With our slim little rifles," the Infantry cry.  
"We've shells," call the Gunners, "to darken the sky";  
"While sabre and lance we gaily will ply,"  
    Sing the Horse as they caper in highest feather.

\* \* \* \*

"They're five to one—but we've piped the tune  
    Through the blazing hours of the August weather;  
It's time to go—maybe none too soon,"  
    Whisper Horse and Guns and Foot together.  
But none would be first to steal away  
From the dance they have piped through the summer day;  
"'Tis we," cry all, "who've the right to stay"—  
    All the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.

Staggering back down the roads they come  
    (The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together),  
And it's hey! for a whistle and a little toy drum  
    To cheer us along through the August weather!  
Thrashed into rags are the uniforms neat;  
Blood-soaked puttees to wrap round the feet;  
"God! What a game, this merry retreat!"  
    Cry the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.

# Prologue

Fighting—marching—fighting again,

Steadily along through September's weather,  
Cheerily singing and laughing at pain,

Go the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.  
Never have men escaped such a Hell ;  
Never had men such a tale to tell ;  
Never shall men such men excel—

*Our Horse, our Guns and our Foot together !*

*Who shall sing the Song of them,  
The wonder and the strength of them,  
The gaiety and tenderness  
They bore across the sea ?  
In every heart's the Song of them,  
The pride that England has in them,  
The chivalry and fearlessness  
That strove—and won Her free.*

# The Marne—and After

## I

### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

K. HEN. *We doubt not of a fair and lucky war,  
          . . . We doubt not now  
          But every rub is smoothed on our way.  
          Then forth, dear countrymen : let us deliver  
          Our puissance into the hand of God,  
          Putting it straight in expedition.*<sup>1</sup>

“DIDN’T I tell you we’d be home by Christmas!” and Sergeant Smart threw a leg triumphantly across the pommel of his saddle and came heavily to ground. (It wasn’t the proper way to dismount, but Smart evidently meant to emphasise the finality of his remark.)

“Throw them leaders off to the left a bit,” he ordered, “and give them Frenchies behind room to pass.”

The lead-driver looked over his shoulder and promptly began to pull across to the right.

“Left, I said,” bawled the sergeant.

<sup>1</sup> The quotation headings throughout the volume are again taken exclusively from Shakespeare’s *Henry V.*

## The Marne—and After

The lead-driver evidently didn't hear, for he continued to pull in the wrong direction as a squadron of French cavalry trotted smartly by in half-sections, greeted with a volley of cheers all down the battery.

Sergeant Smart wisely decided to drop the intricate subject of "rule of the road" in outlandish countries like France, and returned to his first argument as two of his pals joined him. The battery was halting for half-an-hour to water the horses after a hard four hours' stretch—in the right direction.

"You mark my words," said Sergeant Smart with an air of absolute conviction, "at the rate we're going we'll have the Allemons back over their old Rhine before the month's out. And they won't half be sorry they took this job on."

"Bit sanguine, aren't you?" remarked the senior subaltern who was passing and overheard the last words.

"Sanguine, sir? What, after what the General said? Last night's order, sir?"

"No, what was it? I haven't heard," said the senior sub.

"Why, he said—don't remember the exact words—that if all went well he expected to have the German Army scuppered in three days; that it was just up to us to carry out the job." And Sergeant Smart surveyed his audi-



ence with a put-that-in-your-pipe-and-smoke-it air that was irresistibly comic.

"Well, you'd better see that you get a new pair of riding pants before you cross the Rhine," said the senior sub. with a smile, "or the German ladies will all be laughing at you." And he went on up the line to report to the major.

"Will have his little joke," said the sergeant, twisting himself round to see the hole through which the breeze was blowing. "And if it comes to that, Mr. Stanion could do with another pair of boots himself."

"It's a treat to see some of those French chaps at last," a corporal remarked. "Can't think what the hell they've been up to all this time."

"Rummy lot, ain't they, them cavalry coves?" the wheel-driver put in. "Wot d'yer think 'o them tin belly-plates o' theirs, Sergeant? Fat lot o' use ahrt 'ere, I don't think."

"All watered, Sergeant Smart?" a voice rang out.

"All watered, sir."

"Bit up, then, and get mounted."

The senior subaltern salutes the C.O.

"Battery all watered and ready, sir."

A minute later and they're off once again at a steady trot in the hope of getting in a

few rounds at the retreating Huns before night-fall.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, "by the mass" their "hearts were in the trim." Never did an army, harried and hunted for ten interminable days and nights, battered by incredible weight of shell-fire, marching and fighting, dropping through sheer physical exhaustion, staggering up and on again to face and crush some new attack every hour—never did an army turn at last upon its pursuers with such gaiety of spirits in the unconquerable conviction that the fullness of triumph was theirs for the taking.

Once again it was the ingrained spirit of English race and blood. History is full of instances of it. Never to know when you are beaten. By all the rules of war and human disposition those five Infantry Divisions,<sup>1</sup> with a Cavalry Division, had been put out of action more than a week before. So indeed von Kluck believed, or he would not have made the vital mistake he did.<sup>2</sup>

But the gist of the matter was this, and it

<sup>1</sup> Through the common use of the expression "the First Seven Divisions," the public have come to imagine that these divisions formed the original Expeditionary Force. This misnomer is regrettable. The original Force consisted of one Cavalry and four Infantry Divisions. A fifth Division came into line for the battle of Le Cateau, August 26th, 1914, the sixth at the Aisne, and the seventh in Flanders.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* "The Retreat from Mons," p. 227.

## The Turn of the Tide 5

is difficult to understand when we remember the terrible time through which the Force had passed. The men, or a large proportion of them, had seen how again and again they had beaten down heavy enemy attacks. They knew themselves to be the better men, and it was therefore incomprehensible to them why they were always receiving the order to retire. The prevalent feeling was tersely expressed in the remark I have quoted in the earlier volume. "Where the 'ell are we going? and why the —are we retreating? Give 'em socks, didn't we?"

In short, the Force had not been fighting as a forlorn hope, with its back to the wall, as it were, but as a victorious army confident in its ability to advance at any moment and fretting at the unreasonable delay in the passing of the word.

Now that the actual facts of the Retreat are known this state of mind seems incredible. When we recall the overwhelming superiority of the enemy in men and material, and the perfect detail of their preparation and organisation, it is indeed a miracle that any part of the British Force escaped to tell the tale. And yet all the time our men thought that they were the victors. I do not attempt to explain it, I can only just state the fact.

There was, too, another factor which seems

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worthy of mention, for it explains in some degree the difference of outlook between our men and our French Allies in those early days. The French had unforgettable memories of the German invasion of 1870. These, together with subsequent incidents like the Prussian demand, duly enforced, for the dismissal from office of Delcassé the French Foreign Minister, had gradually tended to a belief in the invincibility of Prussian arms. As we remember, this belief was carefully fostered throughout Europe, so that it was not only the French people who were a party to it. And when you are separated from a military menace like that only by the width of a road, and can see for yourselves what it looks like, it is not to be wondered at that the French National Army had a very wholesome dread of its effects.

It was with vastly different feelings that the little professional Army of Britain took the field. For them the might of Germany meant nothing. It was not even a bogey with a turnip head. That it would be a very real and a very stern fight our officers fully realised. But then the professional Army, which is always at work somewhere or other on the confines of Empire, is well used to hard knocks. And so they went into this fight, too, simply because it was their job and, so far as this new army

was concerned, with the belief that the foeman would probably prove worthy of their steel. That was all. I suppose there was hardly a man in the Force who properly appreciated the reasons for the War. That came later, together with evidence of the hellish methods of the Hun.

So it came about that for one reason and another the British Force had to withstand the main shock of the German invasion. How our two Army Corps did so, and how, under God's hand, the victory of the Marne was made possible I have already told. The task, a wholly unexpected one, of our Army was, for the moment, fulfilled. It became now the turn of our French Allies. And it was our French Allies who won the Battle of the Marne. The British played their part right valiantly, but, from the nature of the contest, it was only a comparatively small part which could be allotted to them. The marvel is that they were in such fine fettle that they could play it at all. And that is where von Kluck miscalculated.

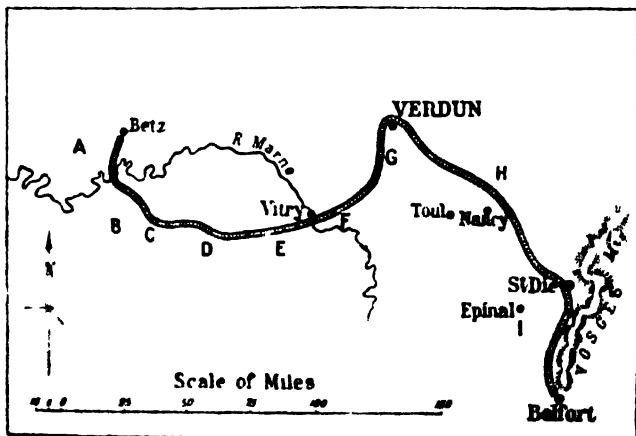
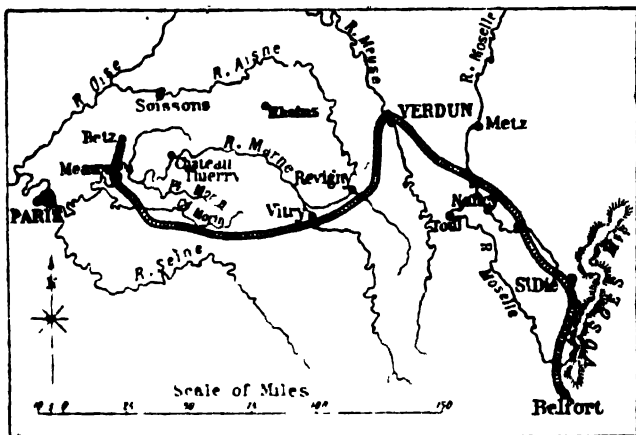
Most people find it extremely difficult to understand just how the tide turned during those critical days. And it is difficult. But as just now we are all soldiers at heart, women as well as men, and as the Marne is one of the decisive battles of the world in which we are all concerned, it is worth giving it a few minutes'

study. I will outline the main facts as shortly and concisely as I can.

On the opposite page is a plan to show the Franco-British line on the eve of the advance, and below it is another to indicate roughly how the various Armies were distributed.

*6th French Army.* Perhaps the first thing you will notice is the appearance of a new French Army on the extreme left, where, up to now, there had only been brigades and occasional troops. This was the 6th French Army. But it was new only in the sense of its appearance in that position. As a matter of fact, this force, consisting of rather more than four divisions, had already suffered severely in the previous fighting in the east. We see it in position on the eve of the advance not as a strong fighting force in itself destined to turn the enemy flank, but rather as the nucleus upon which will shortly be concentrated a succession of reinforcements.

Most of these reinforcements were coming from the south of Paris, and history may probably know them as the "taxi-cab army." The story of how motor-buses, taxi-cabs and every possible vehicle were commandeered to rush the troops across Paris to the battle-front is well known. They came into position, division by division, at various times on September 6, 7, and 8. The actual French attack from



### REFERENCE.

*N.B.*—The letters indicate the approximate centres of the several positions.

A. Vth French Army (General Manoury). B. British Force. C. A Cavalry Corps of Vth French Army (General Conness). D. Vth French Army (General D'Espèrey). E. Vth (or IXth) French Army (General Foch). F. IVth French Army (General de Cary). G. IIIrd French Army (General Sarrail). H. IIrd French Army (General de Castelnau). I. 1st French Army (General Dubail).

## The Marne—and After

this quarter on the German right was begun about mid-day on September 5, 1914, and the main idea was the attempted cutting of von Kluck's line of communications back through Belgium and the outflanking and rolling up of his army on the west, just as he had tried to outflank the British during the Retreat.

*British.* Still looking at the Plan, and moving from west to east, we next come to our own army. They had crossed the stream of the Grand Morin, a tributary of the Marne, and had halted with the Forest of Crécy between them and the enemy. German cavalry and advance guards were still moving towards them from the north across the Marne.

At this time the British losses had not yet been made good, although a welcome reinforcement of about 2,000 men had just joined the Second Corps. These losses, up to September 7, were put at 589 officers and 18,140 N.C.O.'s and men, or a number not very far below one quarter of the strength of the Force when it came into action only a fortnight before. The Second Corps alone had lost 850 officers and 9,200 men, or more than a quarter of its original strength.

In equipment, entrenching tools and so forth, we were rather badly off. During the Retreat men had discarded pretty well everything they carried except their rifles. Great-



## **The Turn of the Tide** II

coats and packs were pitched aside during the first couple of days, and what was then left in the way of tools was lost at Le Cateau. The principal base, too, had been moved from Havre to St. Nazaire, and as the line of communication had not yet been properly re-established it was impossible for the moment to get up new supplies.

But the Army Service Corps was putting in some of the finest work that corps has ever done. And only those who saw a little of its organisation from the inside could realise the enormous difficulties which officers and men had then to surmount. Food and ammunition were the only two things to bother about in those early days, and somehow or other the goods were delivered. The man at the head of that department of the Army's work, the cool and calculating brain which foresaw every contingency and instantly grasped the best way to meet it, this was Sir William Robertson, Quarter-Master-General. No more need be said. And his right hand man was Colonel C. M. Mathew, an officer who had seen most of the fighting there was to be seen on the confines of the Empire since 1884, and as cheery and lovable a man as any in the Force.

*French Armies.*—Immediately on the British right, and bridging the gap to the 5th French Army, came a French cavalry corps

under General Conneau. Then came the 5th Army, the 7th Army (or 9th), and in succession the 4th, 8rd, 2nd and 1st.

*Numbers.* As regards the numbers of the opposing forces along that 800-mile battle-front, it is not easy to give even an approximate estimate. We have a fair idea of the strength of the Franco-British line, but we can only guess rather wildly at the numbers of the enemy. No one has made more carefully reasoned calculations of such figures than Mr. Hilaire Belloc, and his estimate is that the Germans numbered at least 75 Divisions, as against 51 or 52 Franco-British (46 French, 6 British). We may place the Franco-British strength at about 700,000 men.<sup>1</sup>

These figures, together with the Plan, will, I hope, serve to explain the remark that the British could only play a comparatively small part in the great battle or battles of the Marne. I will now, without discussing strategy or tactics, summarise under three heads how the fighting went :

- (1). *East.* An exceedingly heavy German attack was being directed from the north against the line Verdun-Toul-Epinal,

<sup>1</sup> For those who may wish to study in fuller detail the numbers and composition of the Armies, reference is suggested to "A General Sketch of the War—Second Phase," by Hilaire Belloc and Major Whilton's "The Marne Campaign."

and particularly against the centre and the town of Nancy. The importance to the enemy of success at this point may be gauged from the presence there of the German Emperor. Here, after delivering the usual address to his troops, he had dressed himself with more than his usual care, and, surrounded by the usual glittering staff, stood waiting to make his triumphal entry into Nancy.

This attack actually began about September 1. It reached its climax just when General Joffre ordered the advance along the Allied line. The French, with far inferior numbers, held and repulsed the attack with a German loss estimated at about 120,000 men—and the German Emperor decided to see for himself how things were going on in East Prussia.

- (2). *West.* Von Kluck had swerved S.E. in his advance towards Paris. Apparently he thought that the Allied left (the British and 5th French Army) would crumble before his outflanking attack, and that the 6th Army on his right was not worth bothering about.

As already noted the 6th French Army was being built up to try an outflanking scheme upon the German right. Suddenly, then, appeared to von Kluck

## The Marne—and After

this new menace. To meet it he began to withdraw troops from his left (opposing the British). Joffre ordered a general counter-offensive; the 6th Army began their outflanking movement, and the British and 5th Army turned to advance.

The weight of this counter-attack induced the Germans to strengthen their right at the expense of their centre, and

- (8). *The Centre* was broken into by General Foch and his divisions. A gap was discovered in the German line, the French poured in, and by a brilliant stroke the Battle of the Marne was won. The Germans had to retreat all along the line.<sup>1</sup>

There you have the barest possible outline of this great battle. Nor do I even hint at the sternness of the fighting, how the French were at times driven back, clung limpet-like to new positions, rallied and thrust the invaders back once more. To our Allies it was now or never. The decisive stroke, one of the most brilliant and effective coups-de-main in military history, was not actually delivered until the late afternoon of Wednesday, September 9. The

<sup>1</sup> It is not improbable that official histories may considerably modify this theory. The other theory, ably supported by Major Whitton in his book, is that the leading part in winning the battle was really played by General Manoury and his Army on the west. We must wait for the official statement.

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story of it, whichever version is correct, is still to be told as it should be. And if Englishmen are not particularly happy in remembering foreign names, let us at least remember and hold in the highest honour the names of Generals Foch and Manoury.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was late in the evening of Saturday, September 5, that the orders got round that at last we were to advance as part of a general offensive. That evening Generals Smith-Dorrien and Haig visited many units of their respective commands, and if there was any shadow of a lingering doubt in the minds of the G.O.C.'s as to the condition and keenness of the men, that visit finally dispelled it. By good fortune, too, the day had been a complete rest for nearly everyone, and that had worked wonders. Thomas Atkins does like to start his job properly washed and shaved. And I well remember a General Officer making a sudden appearance amongst a platoon of a certain famous county regiment.

"Tshun," yelled a lance-corporal.

Out came the heads covered with soap-suds before the General had time to stop them.

"Go on, men," said the General, "but you will be glad to hear that we're going to advance to-morrow." And with a salute and a smile he passed on.

There was a moment's pause, and then with a yell up into the air went the buckets of soapy water, deluging everyone near by. The men rushed back to their lines, vigorously rubbing their heads dry, to spread the good news.

That was how the lads felt about it.

"I call upon the British Army in France to show now to the enemy its power," said Sir John French in his Order of the Day, "and to push on vigorously to the attack beside the 6th French Army."

Away to the south, through the dim, misty glades of the Forest of Crécy before ever the sun is up, there is a great stirring of marching men. Here and there and on the flanks batteries of field-guns are pushing along hard, for they have some lee-way to make up. Close up with the cavalry screens you will find the Horse Gunners. Their moment, too, is at hand. Years ago the German Kaiser and his Staff recognised them as the finest body of troops in the world; he has seen what they can do in a retirement (L Battery is not forgotten), now he and his merry men shall see what they can do now that the advance is sounded. Yes, it is good to feel that it is the right direction at last.

Back to the riverside town of Melun, where G.H.Q. has its habitation, runs the wireless current of sympathy. Père Joffre has just paid

a visit. "Ça va bien maintenant, n'est ce pas?" "Mais oui, ça marche!" G.H.Q. has done a deal of packing and unpacking these last days. And they are men of few words those red-tabbed, brass-hatted ones. But this time—*ça marche!* Once again a procession of lordly motor-cars takes the dusty roads and the *mairie* is left empty. The townsfolk are sorry to see them go. *Mais si polis, ces anglais!*

Still farther south and we come to our old friends the motor lorries. Right down to Fontainebleau they have displayed Mr. Johnnie Walker and his eyeglass, Mr. Pulltite and his corsets, Mr. Mayflower and his margarine before an enthusiastic country folk. The colours are not so brilliant as they were a month ago. Some of the pictures, too, are chipped by bullet marks, but Mr. Walker smiles serenely as of old, and brings a feeling of peace to our excitable French friends.

Here, too, the rumour comes that the tide has turned. The lorries fill up to their capacity with shells, a last hurried overhauling of parts, and they, too, are reversed for the north. *Tout ça marche!*

At dawn on Sunday, September 6, the battle opened. The tide had turned.

## II

### WITH THE CAVALRY

CHOR. *Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth ;  
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our  
                  kings,  
Carry them here and there.*

PICTURE to yourselves our own fair county of Kent ; enlarge the picture as you would a photograph, and you will see a little of this fragrant countryside of France through which our men are now advancing.

A land rich in orchards, where heavy branches dip down to lazy streams and tell a double harvest of their glowing fruit. A land of yellowing corn, through which, like wind-tracks, run the straight, poplar-lined roads, rising and bending to the gentle hills. A land of tiny towns and sleepy hamlets, of noble châteaux glimmering white against the sky, of tiled cottages and thatched barns dimly seen against the blue dusk of the woodlands.

Into this fair land have the Huns carried their fire and rapine. But thus far and no farther. Along the banks of the little river of the Grand Morin ran the line of their southern-



most bivouacs that eve of the Allied advance. And ever in touch with them our own cavalry patrols are now beginning to drive them back. De Lisle is out there with his 9th Lancers, 4th Dragoon Guards and 18th Hussars. Hubert Gough, too, with the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades.

That first day there was comparatively little fighting, at least on any big scale. The French were pushing ahead pretty fast and seemed to be doing most of the work. With us it was more an affair of outposts, in which the cavalry were more particularly engaged. Little disputes over the passage of a stream, the clearing of a cluster of barns, a squádrón charge upon a spitting machine-gun, and so on.

Typical of this fighting was a trifling affair near Pezarches. A squadron of Lancers was working in advance of a section of Horse Gunners when their scouts were suddenly fired upon from behind a hedgerow which ran across some farm buildings. Two of ours were hit, one in the arm, one in the leg. The four advance scouts, who were dismounted, at once began to fall back upon the main body, firing as they retired.

In the meantime the C.O. dismounted half his troop and lined a parallel hedge to pour in a hot return fire. The other half-troop worked round under cover of a wood to try to get the enemy on the flank.

The enemy fire seemed to slacken, and some of the Germans were seen making for their horses.

“They’re bolting! Come on, boys,” and the subaltern was in his saddle and over the low hedge with his men after him in less time than it takes to tell.

But half way across the open a couple of machine-guns opened fire straight in front. The subaltern mixed up a curse with a prayer that the other half-troop would get round in time and held straight ahead.

Over the next hedge and the subaltern launched straight into the middle of a litter of astonished pigs. Down came the horse and two piglets had all the breath knocked out of them. It was rather inglorious, but they certainly saved the officer’s life. Before he could get up his half-troop were in amongst the few remaining enemy troopers, while the machine-guns went on spitting death into friend and foe alike.

Now the Gunner subaltern had grasped what was happening, and it looked rather serious; nor could he see how he was to lend a hand. Anyway, he decided to trek after the second half-troop. Round the wood the section went at a canter just as the troop was clear and lining up to charge. And then Lancers and Gunners in those breathless seconds could tell what they were up against.

It was a regular little tactical trick of the Germans. A handful of cavalry would form a screen, and working up behind would come a couple, say, of fast motor lorries, each carrying 40 odd men, Jaegers generally, and a couple of machine-guns. The cavalry would hold the line while the infantry deployed, and would then slip away, unmasking the machine-guns. But in this case the enemy evidently had not noticed our flanking movement.

“ Mine, I think ! ” said the Gunner subaltern.

You have to make up your mind pretty quickly in a case like that, and the guns swept out into the open without a check of the pace. A sudden wheel. Then, “ Halt, action front ! ” and an admirably placed shell informed the Huns that the game was not to be so one-sided after all. Before six rounds had been fired two of the machine-guns were out of action and the Lancers charged, while the gunners turned their attention to the motor lorries. One lorry got away ; the other didn't. And a quarter of an hour later one of the first batches of Huns was on its way to comfortable quarters in England.

The whole affair had lasted about a quarter of an hour, and the dear old lady who owned the farm looked on all the while from an upper window, as though it were a stage play arranged

for her especial benefit. When it was all over down she came to help with the wounded and dispense drinks.

The subaltern who had jumped on the pigs, and was none the worse for the adventure save for a sprained ankle, tried to explain.

“Mille pardons, madame,” said he in his best French, “très fâché j’ai jumped on votre petits porcs.”

That settled it. Madame didn’t know what he meant, but she recognised “porcs” and flew out into the yard.

“Good heavens,” exclaimed the Gunner subaltern who was helping to carry one of his men into the house, “there’s some cursed German after the women.” And he drew his revolver and ran, too, as shriek after shriek rent the air.

Round the corner he came full tilt upon half a dozen Lancers doubled up with laughter round an old woman who was calling heaven to witness her grievous loss.

“What the——” he began, taking a trooper by the scruff of the neck. And then he saw.

Well, quiet was at length restored and Madame eventually pacified by a golden half-sovereign and the first subaltern’s cap badge. And that gallant officer is, I am glad to say, still ready and willing to heave you out of the window whenever you may innocently inquire

as to the price of pork. But as he is now a major you have to be rather discreet.

The Germans had certainly brought their machine-gun work to a fine art. In the earlier volume I have described how they used them in infantry attack, and a few more notes at this stage may also prove of interest.

The great importance which the enemy attached to machine-guns is seen from the fact that where the British Army went in for rifle practice and competitions like those at Bisley and elsewhere the Germans held machine-gun competitions. They consider these to be infinitely more valuable. Each infantry regiment carries with it perhaps twelve of these guns, and they are always moved as a part of the regimental transport.

And the ingenuity which has been expended upon this transport is as remarkable as anything in their military organisation. Secrecy seems to be the dominant note. They are carried either on light motor-lorries or two-wheeled carts; sometimes on stretchers with a rug or covering thrown over. And at a short distance away these last look for all the world like a wounded man being carried by a couple of Red Cross orderlies. In fact, on many occasions our men have been completely taken in by the trick and have held their fire.

The carts, too, are generally provided with double bottoms, in which the machine-guns are packed, and perhaps four men ride in the vehicle. The rest of the cart is piled up with odds and ends of various kinds, and no one would guess the real contents. Instances have been recorded at G.H.Q. where some of these carts were captured and the guns never discovered until later someone knocked a bottom through by accident.

Then they have another trick of burying a machine-gun when there is a risk of capture. A wooden cross is put over the "grave," and, of course, no one would dream of disturbing the "body."

But as we have long since come to expect from the Huns, several of the transport tricks are not legitimate. Cases of abuse of the Red Cross were quite common. Knowing the enemy now for what they are it is obvious that they would not miss so excellent an opportunity of getting up close to their opponents by emblazoning their machine-gun lorries with a big red cross.<sup>1</sup> One can recall several instances where our men or French or Belgians have allowed a German Red Cross ambulance to drive close by when, as it passed, the hood

<sup>1</sup> The Germans, with their curious mentality, cannot believe that other nations would not adopt similar tactics in abuse of the Red Cross. Hence their attacks on hospital ships.

(of steel) has been slipped down to disclose a machine-gun which has promptly opened fire.

One particularly flagrant case was recorded a week after the Advance had begun. Here a party of Germans was seen advancing and waving a Red Cross flag in front of four stretchers carried by orderlies. The British officer ordered the cease fire and the party approached. When they were about 300 yards off a murderous maxim fire was opened. A general mix-up followed, and after our reinforcements had satisfactorily disposed of the would-be murderers the stretchers were found with the machine-guns still strapped on them.

As our advance pushed on, although it was rather a slow business at the outset, the fighting became more severe. The enemy made the best use of the difficult country, and we were continually checked by their cavalry and machine-gun tactics. When it was a question of dealing with their cavalry alone, and our own had half a chance, it was all over in a few minutes. It was the combination which worked the mischief. But even here the balance was not too heavy against us, for our cavalry seemed to be as useful dismounted as they were mounted, while their shooting was well up to the standard of the infantry.

I cannot do better than illustrate these two sides of our cavalry work by two incidents which, oddly enough, happened in the same engagement.

A regiment of German Dragoons had pushed its way south through the little village of Moncel after the retreating British. Now had come the inexplicable order to abandon the pursuit and return the way they had come. It was not in the best of tempers that the dragoons clattered once again down the village street, for the cursed English cavalry had been leading them a rare dance all the afternoon, and the experience had not been a pleasant one.

“Captain Schniff with a squadron will hold the village till further orders,” the colonel commanded as he took the remainder of the regiment with him on the northern road.

The captain did not feel too happy about the position, and thought once or twice of telephoning to headquarters for a couple of maxims. However, deciding to make the best of it, he turned his attention to instilling a little wholesome respect for “Kultur” into the villagers. Unfortunately, his class was likely to be a small one, for everybody had fled with the exception of three old women, two girls, two old men and four or five children.

Nothing daunted, he and his men set to work upon the principles officially laid down by his



Government,<sup>1</sup> with the gratifying result that before nightfall the two old men had both been shot for trying to defend their womenfolk from insult; one girl had been outraged and had escaped somewhere after shooting the man with his own carbine, and the remainder had been reduced to a state of mental and physical paralysis.

Thus the night passed without further incident. But in the early morning the outposts fell back upon the village with the news that British cavalry had been seen in considerable strength moving in their direction. With a hurried order to the senior sergeant Captain Schniff made his way to a small outhouse at the end of the village where the field-telephone line ended, and in a few seconds had informed his brigade H.Q. that he was expecting an attack in force at any minute.

It came before he had removed the receiver-cap from his head.

Three sudden shots and Captain Schniff, running out into the street, found himself in the middle of a whirl of men and horses. Half his squadron had mounted, the rest had just got hold of their horses when the wave of British cavalry swept in from the south. A troop of the 9th Lancers, acting as advance guard, had driven

<sup>1</sup> "The Usages of War on Land," issued by the General Staff of the German Army. Translated by J. H. Morgan.

in the outposts, and not knowing, and caring less, what the enemy strength might be, had galloped straight at the village.

A few minutes of mad cut and thrust and the old people were avenged. The Lancers cleared the street from end to end almost in a single sweep. By the little outhouse door stood Schniff, pistol in hand. His first shot brought down a trooper with a bullet through his chest. His second tore a cut through a horse's shoulder. Then the wave swept over him. It passed; but the German captain still stood against the lintel, pinned to the wood with a sabre thrust clean through the neck.

Ranks were re-formed, two or three scouts sent forward to the north, and a message was despatched to the main body to report. There with the 9th Lancers were the 18th Hussars, and a brief debate followed as to whether they should push on or hold the village for a spell. The Colonel in command of the Lancers knew fairly accurately the enemy strength in cavalry in the immediate neighbourhood, and the odds against the British were rather heavy.

However, the point was soon decided for them. Captain Schniff's telephone message had been promptly acted upon, and some four new German squadrons were already well on the way to support their comrades. Our outposts fell back in their turn with the report

that the enemy were approaching fast from two sides.

A squadron of the Hussars was at once sent forward with orders to dismount and get under cover ready to open fire as they saw the best opportunity. The Lancers were formed up clear of the village, but still out of sight of the advancing Germans. The joking and laughter have for the moment died away, and every man sits as though carved in stone with that curious, empty feeling inside which will always creep over one when waiting for the moment. Officers nervously fidget at the reins and try to appear unconcerned as they rack their brains for a sentence or two of encouragement or warning for their men. The Colonel is well out to the front carefully judging the ground and distance. There is a gentle dip in the ground which his eye at once tells him is the spot where the shock should come. That extra down gradient will be worth to him a score more men.

"We'll get them all right," a subaltern says over his shoulder. "They always pull in a bit when we're on them." He had been through it before with his men, and knew about that odd, sudden shrinking which seems to attack German cavalry at the critical moment. The men knew too, and they instinctively settled to a tighter grip in the saddle, every eye on the man who was to lead them. The eternal seconds

passed and the tension grew till it was well-nigh unbearable; just as when a bowstring is slowly drawn back until it seems that the yew will surely snap.

Suddenly the Colonel sees that the moment has come. The enemy are riding diagonally across his front, and it may be possible to meet them before they can fully change direction. The signal is given and the Lancers have started, so steadily that they might be entering the arena at Olympia for the musical ride.

The pace increases. The Colonel has given his men plenty of room, for they'll need every bit of advantage they can get. "Steady, men, steady!" The enemy have begun to wheel—*Now!*

One tremendous bound forward and the gallant horses are stretched out to the uttermost. Down the slope they thunder. Each man tries to pick an opponent, but there is no time. There is one mighty crash all down the line. The Lancers have got home. Heave! and they are through. Through, with hardly a check of the pace, and on. The files close in and the men begin to drag at the bit reins. A wheel into section, and so to the village, again.

The Germans, too, have checked and wheeled round, but they are not so steady. Though by far the heavier cavalry they have

been badly mauled. It was like the little English ships sailing through and raking the great galleons of the Spanish Armada. Still, they recover and turn to retire the way they had come. Back they trot, re-forming ranks as they go. Now they have reached the northern end of the village. Now three hundred yards past, when there is a sudden burst of rifle fire and a hail of bullets ploughs through the hardly formed ranks.

(You had forgotten all about the Hussars, hadn't you?)

But the Germans know what discipline means, and they are courageous enough too. There is a momentary confusion, but a sudden word of command pulls them together, and about eighty odd men from the inner flank wheel about.

"By Jove!" exclaims the Hussar squadron leader, "they're actually going to charge us." Then, after a moment to make sure, "Cease fire!—we'll wait for 'em," he adds to himself.

The other officers and N.C.O.'s see in a moment what they are to do. It is an old trick, but it calls for nerves of steel to carry it out. The Hussars had been firing "rapid independent" on the retiring Germans, and it is not always easy to get your men quickly in hand again, especially when there is an avalanche of men and horses coming down on

top of you. Still, the Germans do not hold a grinding monopoly in discipline, and you might say that a crack British regiment will go one better, for the men are trained and disciplined as human beings, not machines.

“Not a shot till you get the word, and then two good volleys,” sings out the O.C. “Aim low.”

The German cavalry has covered 150 yards. They are getting alarmingly close, and coming for all they are worth dead straight. Again it is just a matter of seconds, but the O.C. is as cool as though it were practice on the Pirbright ranges.

100 yards! and—“Pfire!”

Every Hussar had picked his man, and that one volley accounted for practically the entire line of Dragoons. They say that only ten got back.

So ended perhaps the most brilliant cavalry engagement of the war up to that date, and, so far as I am aware, up to the time of writing. It illustrates very happily the mounted and dismounted work of our cavalry in those early days. All the world knows how magnificently they fought later in the trenches and not only our own Home cavalry, but those splendid men from India, the Deccan Horse, the Poona Light Horse, and other crack regiments.

The story, too, seems to tell of an adven-

ture in some earlier war. Of a time when the enemy was worth of your steel, and each faced the other for clean give-and-take fighting, with the better man to win. No rancour on either side, but a shake of the hand and a drink shared when it was over. Oh, the pity of it that the Germans cannot always fight so!

### III

#### KULTUR

K. HEN. *Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God.*

NEVER, I suppose, since the dawn of history have a number of men crowded into so small a circle of time so many and such varied experiences as those which fell to the lot of that First Expeditionary Force of ours during the first six weeks of the war. I look back upon those autumn days of 1914, and they seem no more than "the insubstantial pageant of a dream." A dream from which, on the awakening, a few incidents stand out sharp and clear, but all else is lost save only a sense of atmosphere, of environment.

It was that atmosphere which I sought to recapture for the first part of the narrative. And now, as I embark upon the "second part, I find that some subtle change has taken place. "Naturally," you will exclaim, "you have turned from a harassed retreat to a victorious advance. Of course it is different."

No, it is not that; at least, not wholly that.



I can see the dividing line between retreat and advance, but it is something bigger, more vague. Somehow the general tone of the campaign is different. The enemy is not the same, the countryside, the inhabitants, all are changed. Before the Advance was four days old there seems to have been, looking back now, some indefinable change even with our own men, some difference in outlook, some subdued note which sounded like a grave counterpoint beneath their natural elation at the turn of affairs. I do not think this lasted, for the inborn gaiety of the British soldier soon reasserted itself. But I seem to have detected it throughout this month of September.

And I am inclined to think that the new mental outlook which did not come upon us until the Advance had well begun was due to this, that we realised for the first time the incredible tragedy of this mighty social cataclysm. Look back for a moment and you may perhaps understand.

Barely a month had passed since that fateful August holiday night. Scarcely had the men realised that the country was at war before they were swept up by a giant hand, thrust into trains and troopships, dropped into a foreign land, hurried through the country and set before this Prussian god of destruction like Hindoo devotees before the car of Juggernaut. Before

they could begin to adjust themselves to these astonishing conditions they were swept back again through the mazes of a veritable nightmare. Everything was unreal, phantasmal. Villages, countryfolk, the pursuing hordes of blue-grey figures, all seemed to dance through the brain like motes in a vampire mist.

Then slowly came the awakening. The dream-cloud lifted and they began to see clearly. Before the Retreat had ended the men were themselves again. They turned to drive their pursuers back; and as they drove them back the British and French *saw*. Now they knew War for what it was; they recognised for what they were the beings who had hurled it upon the world.

So this was modern war; and this was how a great modern and civilised people waged it! "Kultur had passed that way!"

It was along the line of the Grand Morin river, from the town of Coulommiers through Rebas and so beyond La Ferté that our men made their first real acquaintance with German "Kultur." There had been a few isolated instances during the Retreat, symptoms of Hun brutality which had for the moment stricken with horror the unit immediately concerned. But now the troops suddenly crossed the threshold of a new world; a world which revealed

as in a blinding lightning-flash not merely the wanton excesses and unbridled licence of an invading army, but the unspeakable depravity of a nation.

Remember that at this time the war was barely a month old. The civilised world had not yet learned of the crimes committed in Belgium; the *Lusitania* had not been sunk, Rheims Cathedral had not been shelled, the ghastly story of Wittenberg camp was yet to come. Even the rumour about Dinant, Termonde and Louvain had barely reached the Army in the field, nor indeed was it credited. Personally, the first mail I received after leaving England on August 14, and the first newspaper I saw, was on September 16 at the Aisne. We knew practically nothing of the course of events. I mention these facts to suggest more clearly how unprepared the men must have been for the sights they now witnessed.

The little town of Rebais was the first. There were about two streets of houses still standing, the remainder was merely a ruin. When the first British troops entered after driving out the enemy it was imagined that the town was quite deserted. But after diligent search a few old men and half-crazy women were discovered in cellars and basements. A corporal and a couple of men got into one shop, and in the back room found two young girls.

They were trying to climb up the blank wall, legs and arms outstretched, as though they were flies. At the entrance of the men they merely glanced over their shoulders and laughed—a laugh which sent a shudder through the veins. When the corporal touched them they turned round, crouched on the ground and fawned upon him like puppies. In a cot close by lay the broken body of a tiny child. The corporal went out and reported to his officer with the tears rolling down his face.

Rebais, too, was the scene of one of the most extraordinary cases of sexual perversion on the part of some Germans ever recorded. I cannot possibly set down the story here; besides, it has already been published.<sup>1</sup> But it may be remarked in passing that one of the outstanding features of Hun "Kultur," as exhibited in Belgium and Northern France, has been a glut of such obscene and bestial acts as can only be detailed between the covers of a book of medical science as instances of mental and physical depravity.

From this line of country northward to the Aisne the Huns had left behind them one long track of foul deeds, ruin and desolation; a memory which nothing will efface from the heart of the French people till France is no more a

<sup>1</sup> "German Atrocities" (T. Fisher Unwin), by J. H. Morgan, late Home Office Commissioner with the B.E.F., p. 62.

nation. Some few places escaped in great measure, but there was not one which did not bear some traces of that trail of slime.

Here is a charming country-house which looks down to Nogent and the smiling valley of the Marne. One wing of the house projects and encloses on three sides a large courtyard. A company of our infantry bivouacked hard by one night, and the officers thought they might find hospitality in the house. Unable to make anyone hear, they went round to the courtyard side. This is what they found. The yard was ankle-deep in feathers—of pigeons and chickens. The gutters ran black-red with the blood of pigs and farm-stock. Hundreds of birds must have been slaughtered—from the number of pigeonries around the owner was evidently a fancier on a large scale.

The officers found a door open and entered the house. Stumbling over some broken wood-work and a big “grandfather” clock which lay across the passage, they came to a room which lay in darkness save for a narrow shaft of light from a chink in the shutters. Through the door there drifted a stench beside which the open sewers of a Chinese city in the height of summer would have smelt like a rose-garden. When at last they had ventured in, candles in hand, it was found that, in addition to the carcass of a pig which had been slaughtered on the carpet,

the room had been used, evidently by a number of men, as a latrine. Everything, too, which could be broken lay shattered on the floor, with curtains, blinds, tapestries and chair-coverings smeared with excreta and filth.

To cut the story short, practically every room in the house was in much the same condition. The state of the bedrooms, the linen, ladies' garments and so forth was simply indescribable.

One isolated case? No. Ask the French Government how many of their châteaux in those Departments of France escaped such a fate.

In the great majority of cases the destruction or, in its milder forms, the mischief, was purely wanton. Destruction simply for the sake of destruction. Ironmongery shops and houses where there were plenty of bottles and glasses to smash seemed particular favourites. In town after town we came across ironmongers' where thousands of nails and screws were scattered from the drawers and boxes all over the floors; or perfumers' shops where all the bottles of liquids had been broken by pistol bullets or rifle butts.

Cooking utensils would be looted in one town, used and then thrown into the ditch to save the trouble of transport, and the process would be repeated in the next village. At least, this was the only explanation we could imagine

for the number of pots and pans found lying about uncleaned.

Systematic looting was quite the least of the crimes committed. And one may give some idea of the extent to which this was carried out by citing the one town of Coulommiers, a place about the size of Tunbridge Wells. Here the Huns, during the two days of their occupation, pillaged the houses and did minor damage to the value of some £16,000. Such was the condition of the town when our troops expelled the Germans from it at the beginning of September.

Of the outrages and mutilations inflicted upon women and young girls and children I hardly trust myself to write. Their number seemed well-nigh incalculable. Never a town, village, or hamlet, rarely a farmstead did our men pass during those days of victory and horror but poor victims stretched forth imploring arms or lay still with fast-glazing eyes, mute witnesses to the bestial savagery of the invaders, the nation of supermen destined by their "friend" God to inherit the earth. Of a surety will the God Whom they never cease to blaspheme take His count upon them on that Great Day when St. Joseph shall marshal before Him in witness the ranks of those poor tortured souls.

Though vengeance, though repayment are His, yet such is man that he must at times rejoice at the finding of a human instrument. One such case I recall, and I can find no regret in my heart for the fate of one, at least, of these savages.

It was at a farm near Château-Thierry. A patrol of Uhlans rode by. Through the open door they could see the goodwife busy about her duties, crooning the while to her baby as he played by the hearth. Roughly the men demanded food, and, entering, one of the patrol made as if to hurt the child. Food was refused, the woman saying that she had nothing in the house. A search of the house proved fruitless, and they again made their demand. Again she replied that there was none. Thereupon the men seized her, pinned her against the door and crucified her, arms outstretched, with knives through her wrists. The child they seized, broke one of his tiny arms, and threw him down before her. Then they rode away, leaving behind one of their number for some purpose or other.

When the patrol had gone on the man who remained again asked for food and drink. And the woman, in agony, nodded assent. The knives were withdrawn. The man seated himself at the table while the woman staggered out to the back. In a minute or so she returned, holding something under her apron.



The Uhlan sat quietly at the table looking through a notebook. The woman came behind him as though to place a dish on the table. A sudden effort and she drew from beneath her apron a heavy chopper. With a single crash she split his skull. Then, seizing her baby, she fled out into the woods.

There is perhaps no people in the world who have earned a more sinister reputation for ingenuity in torture than the Chinese. Methods employed in our own country during the Middle Ages or by the Spanish Inquisition were bad enough, as we know too well. But Germany, with its stucco civilisation, has outdistanced all. The Chinese are adepts in the torture of the body; the Germans torture body and soul. The Chinese may torture the individual; the Germans add the refinement of torturing two or more together. They will outrage a wife in the presence of her husband, a daughter before her mother. They will tie a mother up and mutilate her baby before her eyes. All these things have they done again and again: not in the heat of battle, but under the coolness of rigid discipline; with the connivance and encouragement of their officers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A typical and thoroughly authenticated case, where a German soldier dipped a baby's head into a saucepan of boiling water to make the mother produce some more coffee, is quoted in the Appendix to the Bryce Report, p. 287.

## 44      The Marne—and After

A company of British infantry was marching through a Marne village. One of the men turned to wave a hand to a little girl whose face appeared at a first-floor window of a cottage.

"Silly owl!" remarked a pal. "Can't you see it's a doll?"

The company marched on. In the evening some men from an Irish regiment joined up, and it chanced that the little incident of the afternoon was mentioned in a joking way.

"It *was* a child," said an Irishman gravely. "Shure, we saw herself. McClusky and me and some of us went in. 'Twas a baby tied across the window, with a cruel bay'net in her. Aye, and an old man, too, and a woman and a boy, all stabbed to the death."<sup>1</sup>

Do you begin dimly to realise what was this new world through which the British Army was advancing? Do you now appreciate a little of the feeling which steeled their hearts?

And since it is of interest to learn how the invaders themselves regarded their own doings, here is the translation of a portion of a letter written by a German soldier,<sup>2</sup> and selected at

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the incident narrated in "The Retreat from Mons," p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> The name, regiment, brigade and division of the writer are on the original, together with date and town.

random from a number of others. The letter is addressed to a German girl.

"I am sending you a bracelet made out of a shell. It will be a nice souvenir for you of a German warrior who had been through the whole campaign and killed many French. I have also bayoneted several women. During the fight at Batenville (*sic*) I did for seven women and four young girls in five minutes," etc.

On the other hand, it is pleasant to record that one diary at least has come into the possession of the French authorities in which the author, an officer in a Saxon corps, honestly deplores the vandalism and wanton outrages committed by the soldiery.

"The place," he writes, "is a disgrace to our army." And he adds the significant words: "The column commanders are responsible for the greater part of the damage, as they could have prevented the looting and destruction."

With that I close this harrowing chapter. I have tried to set forth those incidents as dispassionately as possible, and have steeled myself to the effort. Of several I write at first-hand. There are others still more horrible of which I know but cannot narrate. To say that the memory of those scenes is scared for

ever in the brain is hopelessly inadequate. They have changed the very lives of the men who witnessed them. How could it be otherwise?

And I have made myself write them down partly that this may be a true narrative of those early days of this War of Liberation, but rather that our people may realise—so far as a printed page can compel—the real nature of this enemy of civilisation and humanity.

I have remarked that it is the depravity of a whole nation rather than the individual excesses of an army which is responsible for these things. A national army reflects the spirit of the nation. The German Army was, at the outbreak of war, just such an army as Britain in 1916 had in the field. Representative, I mean, of the nation as a whole. It was not a select body of professional troops such as ours was. And it was that national army—and, through it, the German people—which was guilty of those incredible outrages against all laws human and divine.

For years past, though but a few of us realised it, the criminal statistics of Germany have indicated only too plainly the rapid moral degeneration of the people. It has at length found its expression, so far as the rest of the world is concerned, in the tremendous catalogue of crimes committed by German soldiers and

sailors, which, from the number and the ferocity of them, have actually at last dulled the brain of civilisation. We have, for instance, come to accept the murder on the high seas of women and children as a matter of everyday occurrence.

But no national army and navy, recruited as it is from the ranks of the nation itself, could possibly be guilty of such obscenity and criminality were it not that the poison had choked their very blood. It is the German people who are guilty. Have we already forgotten the unholy joy throughout Germany which greeted the sinking of the *Lusitania* and so the deliberate murder of scores of women and children? Or the delight evinced when Zeppelins shed destruction on harmless non-combatants? Or the deliberate torture inflicted by German *civilians* upon helpless, wounded prisoners of war conveyed through their country? Or, most incredible of all, the calculated and callous cruelty of German Red Cross nurses, the mothers, sisters and wives of Germans?

They say that we fight to crush Prussian militarism; that we will never treat with the Hohenzollerns and ruling caste; that we would free the German people from their oppressors. How foolish it sounds! We understand the Germans as little as the Germans understand human beings. What purpose to humanity

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will be served by a German revolution? The German people remain. Does civilisation hope completely to change the mental and physical outlook of an entire people who, in their nature, have altered not a whit since they emerged from their primeval caves and forests?

These are the things which I would have my fellow-countrymen and women remember when the day of reckoning comes. The men who are now fighting in France and Flanders have not seen things such as I have set down. But there are still amongst them a few—a tiny few—who have seen and who remember. Shall not these be allowed a voice when that reckoning arrives? And France? *She* will never forget. And it is France and Belgium who will cast the die; for it is they who have suffered. Suffered in such wise as this England of ours has not dreamed of.

*Par mes champs dévastés, par mes villes en flammes,  
Par mes étages fusillés,  
Par le cri des enfants massacrés et des femmes,  
Par mes fils tombés par milliers—  
Je jure de venger le Droit et la Justice.*

And if at the last the justice of men cannot reach the criminals, still is there the justice of God, and that shall not fail.

“They have no wings to fly from God.”

## IV

### DAYS OF THE ADVANCE

K. HEN.            *The game's afoot :*  
                  *Follow your spirit, and upon this charge*  
Cry—"God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"<sup>h</sup>

HALF a dozen dumpy, grey motor-buses, newly sped out of Paris, came panting heavily up the hill. They had been converted by French ingenuity into big meat-safes, and as they climbed one caught a glimpse of legs of mutton through the wire gauze which was stretched across the window-frames.

"Benk, 'O'burn, Benk! Penny all the way!" was the greeting all down the ranks of a perspiring battalion incontinently thrust to the side of the road to allow the vehicles to pass.

"We could do with a few o' them, mate," remarked Private Cherry to his next number. "That's wot we want—some of them ole number 'levens orf of the Strand. It's orl' right, this foot-sloggin' is, in a manner o' speakin'; but wot I sez is, that yer carn't ginger up the Allemons not 'arf wot yer might. Lumme! They carn't arf 'op it! Why, yer——"

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“Fall in!”

The men drop-back into their fours, and in a few moments are off again after the retreating Germans.

By now that retreat is beginning to look suspiciously like a rout. It was not that, but the men were mightily cheered by the sight of abandoned vehicles and impedimenta of all kinds, and particularly by the steady stream of prisoners being passed through to the rear. You can imagine the curiosity with which Private Thomas A. regarded the first detachments which were escorted by. The general opinion was summed up in the sentence:

“Rummy-lookin’ lot of blighters, aren’t they?”

And you may take that as an expression of amused affection, criticism, pity, dislike, or sarcasm, as you please. Knowing something of Tommy and his ways, I am inclined to think that there was a generous sprinkling of the first-named quality included. That was at the beginning. After a few days’ experience of their behaviour, and until the Aisne was reached, that opinion was somewhat modified. It ran:

“\_\_\_\_\_!”

Those Huns became a positive nuisance. You couldn’t move without running up against little parties anxious to return to



England, and our lads were far too busy to bother about providing escorts. Not that escorts were really needed, for Cousin Fritz was remarkably docile. A single uniform of khaki was quite sufficient, even if the wearer carried no more lethal a weapon than a walking-stick.

Long after the wave of pursuit had rolled the Germans back, they still went on surrendering to the bus-drivers and A.S.C. in the rear. One A.S.C. corporal went for a short evening stroll in a little wood hard by. He did not even carry a stick, but he came back decorated with rifles and bayonets and things, and three sheepish Huns in tow.

A special department was needed to cope with prisoners. This was soon improvised, and our men got into the habit of straggling off to round up Huns. It became quite an evening pastime if there was a halt of a few hours for a rest and food. By the way, there is another little habit of Thomas A. You would imagine that he would be only too glad to sit down after a stiff march and a bit of a scrap, have his tea and smoke his "fag" in peace. Not a bit of it. If he cannot find a football to kick about, he'll sit and "buck" on every conceivable subject until he has to fall in again—and then he is so sleepy he can't keep his eyes open.

And the chance of securing a few souvenirs for the "missus" at home was too good to let slip. Some of these little trophies of the chase were quite worth having, although I am not quite sure that Tommy should have taken them. We have a somewhat different standard from the Hun in these matters. Still, as most of the souvenirs were pressed upon the captors out of gratitude, it was probably in order. Of course, a handsome gold watch, or a pair of useful field-glasses, may sometimes have changed hands as an expression of gratitude; but I suspect that cases involving a little gentle persuasion were not quite unknown, for it is difficult to imagine that a Hun would willingly part with such things.

A lad of mine was very proud over one of his captures. I don't know how this particular man was rounded up, but he turned out to be no less a personage than the premier marksman of the German Army. At least, he said he was, and showed the gold Imperial badge on the sleeve of his tunic. The badge now reposes in a little frame on the wall of a best parlour somewhere down the Walworth Road, S.E.

"Here is another trifling incident in this wholesale capture of Huns which shall be recorded, not because it was of any particular importance or interest, but because its suc-

cessful issue was in some measure due (I will be quite frank with you) to one of my own little fads. Most of us have our fads and fancies, and one of mine chances to be insisting on the importance of "observation," keeping your eyes and ears open and making correct deductions from trifles. Incidentally, the men concerned were town lads, who were only beginning such training.

One morning a farmer came along and begged us to settle up with some Huns who were making themselves too much at home in his house. A small patrol of men under a corporal, all being trained in observation work, was selected. They had to try to rush the farm without their approach being seen.

The back of the farm gave on to a copse of trees. "What kind of trees?" asked the corporal. "Beech," was the reply. So the corporal knew at once that as there is little or no undergrowth in a beech copse it would be difficult to get at the house unseen from that side. However, they made a start.

Very quietly they approached the copse. Suddenly a pair of wood-pigeons flew out, disturbed, so they guessed, by someone in the wood. That settled it, for there was no one else about save the Huns. The patrol crept round to the front, got in and surprised four Huns in the back kitchen. A fifth was in the

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copse collecting wood. Had the corporal not known about beech trees, and had they missed the significance of the pigeons' flight, the little surprise might not have come off so successfully.

A keen Press correspondent would have given his ears for the chance of being present with the B.E.F. on Tuesday and Wednesday, September 8 and 9, and of standing on the southern ridges above the Marne Valley as the fighting developed. For the moment one seemed to forget the horror of modern warfare in this bird's-eye view of intense movement. Here, at least, was a battle out of the story books, and one may reasonably doubt whether such another will ever be witnessed.

Our front ran along the south bank of the Marne and extended, roughly, from Château-Thierry on the east to La Ferté on the west. Midway between lay the village of Nogent l'Artaud. This was only a small place, but of considerable importance, owing to the main road from the south which passed through and crossed the river by an excellent bridge, a fine specimen of French engineering work. The river at this point is about as broad as the Thames at Windsor. On either bank the ground slopes gradually down, the ridges on the southern banks being rather the higher. The

dead level of the valley, with the river flowing through, is perhaps a mile across.

Thus standing on the high ground above Nogent you get a fine panorama of the Marne Valley, and so it is from here that we will watch events for a few minutes. The general position is that you have the German rear-guards crossing the river and following the main bodies which are trekking off to the north as hard as they can move. The British are gradually gaining the southern ridges and then launching down into the valley and up beyond in stern pursuit. But although it is definite pursuit, the fighting is deadly serious all through, and every point of vantage which can help the enemy is hotly contested by them.

At La Ferté the Third Corps<sup>1</sup> under General Pulteney were having a stiff fight to cross the river, for the Germans had destroyed the bridges. But the good old English county regiments down there were not going to be held up by a trifle like that. They'm coom up from Zommerzet, they be—and Zommerzet breeds good fighting men. And then there are lads from the stiff plough-lands of Essex, as hardy as the soil of that stern county. And there are Hampshire lads, and

<sup>1</sup> This corps (so-called) was then composed only of the Fourth Division and 19th Infantry Brigade. It will be remembered that these commands had been hitherto working under General Smith-Dorrien.

lads from lovely Warwickshire, and lads fra Lancashire. Wales, too, with her Fusiliers, had her share of the fight that day. Add in Highlanders and battalions of three different Irish regiments, and you'll see what a command that little Third Corps was. The G.O.C. should have been a proud man those days.

The bridges are gone and the Germans hold the north bank with a few dozen machine-guns. Behind these up the slopes are batteries of field-guns. No, it does not seem a very easy task.

British batteries, not more than a dozen, have slipped into positions in support of our infantry. To the rear there are a couple of "heavy" batteries. We, too, have a few machine-guns, but very few. It was a weapon which had not been considered by the powers-that-were of particular importance.

All day long British and Germans pounded away at each other with no great effect on either side. Our guns could not always manage to locate and silence the enemy machine-guns, and an attempted crossing of the river by the infantry would thus have been sheer madness, for there was as yet no bridge.

In the afternoon the cheery news came along that both the First and Second Corps had crossed the Marne higher up and were pushing ahead. Third Corps H.Q. was quite seriously

annoyed at being left. But their hour had almost struck. It was now up to the Sappers to provide the means.

At two or three favourable points the bridging materials were ready. As the darkness gathered these were rushed down to the bank and the Sappers went at it like demons. The night was pitch dark save for the fitful flashes from the guns and a gleam from burning houses on the north bank; later the rain came down in torrents.

Swiftly but surely the Sappers worked. At one point something like a dummy bridge was made where the burning shone more brightly. This to draw the enemy's fire so far as possible. The ruse succeeded admirably. But a company of the Blankshires, very bored at the long wait, decided to make a little voyage of discovery on some roughly-made rafts. Gaily they slipped from the moorings, and once out in the stream promptly lost all control. A little later some of the "Jocks" who were patiently waiting farther down the river heard a medley of strange oaths, gurgles, and frantic splashings coming from midstream. There was no mistaking a good, honest English "damn," even though uttered in broad dialect, and that probably saved the explorers from a hot rifle fire from the Scots.

"What the de'il are ye doin' oot there this

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time o' the nicht? "'a voice rang out from the bank.

"We're the Blankshires—trying to cross," came the plaintive answer.

"Ye're no the Blankshires"—this very emphatically—"ye're a daft set o' loonies tae gang paddlin' about i' the burn this middle o' the nicht. Gin ye maun wash yersels ye dinna need to mak' sic a boast about it."

But by the time the little homily was finished the adventurers were nearly out of hearing. Some of them jumped overboard and reached the bank, but for the remainder it was a forlorn little party which drifted into a French outpost in the early morning and was rescued. "Quite mad, all these English," remarked the French captain, and no one bothered any more.

Long before the dawn the Sappers had finished their job and the infantry had slipped across. Once at grips with the enemy there was little further trouble so far as La Ferté was concerned. But the Third Corps, with the Fourth French Corps (8th Division) next on their left, still had a very tough proposition in the shape of a very strong artillery position held by something like ninety German guns. I believe this was eventually solved by the Second Corps driving in a wedge behind the position and forcing a retirement.

**The crossing of the Marne by Nogent and**



Charly was noteworthy because there was no resistance. It was an awkward place to capture, and there was that excellent bridge there which the enemy were certain to destroy. Great were the preparations for the assault, and everyone was on the tiptoe of excitement.

You picture our advance guards spread out down the slope to the village, creeping forward from cover to cover. Nearer still, and not a rifle shot breaks the silence of that early September morning. Not a blue-grey coat to be seen, not a movement in the valley. It was all so uncanny that the men were convinced that they were going straight into some devilish ambush.

At length a couple of scouts went forward. They were watched down to the outlying houses. A woman came out.

"Where's the Allemonds, mother?" asked one of the scouts, keeping his eyes and ears open for any sign of movement.

The good woman replied with a torrent of abuse against the "accursed ones." Then, seeing that the man couldn't understand a word she took him by the arm and drew him towards the house.

"Here, what's the game?" said the man, very naturally holding back.

The woman pushed open the door and pointed in. Then the man saw it all in a flash.

Inside were four Germans lying on the floor amid a heap of empty bottles, dead drunk. And from the gestures of the woman he soon gathered that there were plenty of others about in the same condition. In fact, the village had been the scene of a tremendous drinking bout. The Germans had come across a fine stock of old wine, and the day before a regiment had drunk itself senseless. There were now only about thirty left in the village incapable of moving; the remainder had slipped away on the approach of the British, and were gradually rounded up in batches in the neighbouring woods. And a nice-looking lot of camp-followers they were too!

The bridge had been heavily barricaded, and it took nearly an hour to cut the barbed wire away. They had evidently intended to make a stiff fight for it, but the wine was too good to miss. Incidentally, there were no preparations for blowing up the bridge, and from the fact that several others were left intact General Smith-Dorrien remarked at the time that he suspected they were left so for use on the return journey of the Germans. Well, the bridges are still waiting for them.

Elsewhere the crossing of the Marne was not so easy. The First Corps, for instance, had some very hard fighting before they gained the

northern bank. They had, also, one or two old-fashioned spectacular displays to cheer them on. There was one place where the Germans had run a pontoon bridge across. If you are standing on the crest above Nogent you'll probably be able to pick it out with a pair of good glasses; it is up towards Château-Thierry. One of our airmen reported a mass of enemy troops crossing, streaming down one slope and up the other. A Horse Battery was the first to open fire. I don't remember what the range was, but it was like the dear old pre-war Practice Camp days on Salisbury Plain when a couple of canvas screens representing cavalry used to roll down towards the guns, and you'd plug in shell at about 800 yards' range and go home for lunch.

The Horse Gunners had it all to themselves for nearly a quarter of an hour—the time of their lives. Then a Field Battery came along, and the Major's face, when he saw what they were firing at, would have given Bairnsfather a fine idea for a new sketch. One recalls Jellicoe's too-good-to-be-true message to Beatty and the battle-cruisers at Jutland Bank, "You can sheer off now; I'll finish the job."

Anyway, a compromise was effected; the Horse Gunners limbered up and clattered off for a still nearer view of the target, while the Field Gunners set contentedly to work in their

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stead. I can see that Major now, sitting on the No. 1 gun wagon-body with a chunk of hard chocolate in one hand and half a French roll in the other, as he switched the battery from one part of the target to another, as though he were spraying a flower-bed. He did not, however, get so long an innings as the Horse Gunners, for an enemy battery, with the exact range, began to retaliate, and he had to run his guns back. Still, it was a nice chatty little twenty minutes while it lasted.

Everywhere the roads were littered with equipment, arms and vehicles, and there was no doubt that the retirement was more hurried than the enemy had intended. But, as it turned out, we were only engaged with very strong rear-guards, and critics say that the British should have pushed on a great deal more rapidly than they did. To that I am not competent to reply; I can only remark that the spirit and élan of the men could not possibly have been keener, and I do not quite see how they could have speeded up the driving power unless it were with the horses.

For the horses, poor old comrades, were suffering a good deal, especially as the weather had begun to turn wet and cold. Remember what they had gone through in the last three weeks and how nobly they had responded to every call. Remember, too, that in no army

in the world is so much care bestowed upon its horses as in ours. To the trooper or driver his horse (or pair) is almost his best pal, and you, an Englishman or woman who reads, will know what that must mean. One of the first things taught to a recruit in a mounted regiment is the idea of making his horse a pet. And, so far as the Gunners are concerned, you will find one indirect result of that happy teaching in the reputation which the Regiment has won for being able to drive the guns over the most impossible country and take them anywhere. What a wonderful combination it would be to have the French ".75's" with English teams and drivers!

But if it was almost impossible to keep the horses in condition the men were in splendid fettle, despite all their hardships. People are rather apt to forget that this was identically the same army which had just won through the Retreat, and that, as yet, there had been no opportunity for any rest and reorganisation. In equipment the officers were as badly off as the men. Most of them had no great-coats, waterproof sheets, nor any change of clothing, for all extra kit had been ruthlessly sacrificed or thrown away. At one point, it will be remembered, orders had been issued to destroy all officers' baggage.<sup>1</sup> In my own unit, for in-

<sup>1</sup> Vide "The Retreat from Mons," p. 220.

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stance, I do not believe there were more than a dozen pairs of serviceable boots left. The men stuck to their work with bare feet coming through what was left of the leather. And this shortage was not made good for another three weeks.

The base was right away down at the mouth of the Loire, and the farther we advanced the more difficult it became to get up supplies. Also, during the Retreat, a large number of railway bridges had been destroyed behind us, and this meant that in the Advance the trains could not get within some 80 miles of us. The wonder is that the A.S.C. achieved so much in getting up food and ammunition. On the Retreat there was a reasonable chance of getting food and little necessities in the towns and villages, for the country was then untouched. Now we were moving forward in the track of a plague of locusts, and you could not buy even a box of matches or a stick of chocolate. Perhaps if critics will bear all these little facts in mind they will not be so ready to condemn.

A typical example of the difficulties of the fighting in the Marne valley was furnished by an episode in which the D.C.L.I.'s<sup>1</sup> played a part. It was a fight for Montreuil aux Lions,

<sup>1</sup> Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry : serving in 14th Infantry Brigade, Fifth Division.

a little place strongly held by the enemy and screened by thick woods.

It began with one of those desperate attacks, doomed to failure, by infantry insufficient in numbers across the open upon strong, concealed defensive positions. However, the D.C.L.I.'s were ordered to clear the enemy out, and so they tackled the job straight away.

One company worked round to a flank by a sunken road, deployed into extended order along a hedgerow and waited for the signal. A second company deployed in similar fashion for a frontal attack. With a shrill blast of a whistle they were all on their feet. A twenty yards' rush only brought a few scattered rifle-shots from the wood, and they were on their feet again for a second advance. Then the storm broke. There must have been a dozen maxims protecting that short front of wood, and with a single crash they opened fire on the Cornwalls. Within twenty seconds those two companies lost half their number.

Reserves doubled up to their support, and a second gallant attack was repulsed in the same way, though a couple of our own maxims backed it up so far as they could. Four times at different points did the Cornwalls face the murderous fire. In one corner they got home, and for a few minutes there was fierce work with the bayonet and rifle-butt. Two guns they

captured, but the corner was too hot to hold, and they went down fighting to the last man.

By now it was the late afternoon, and messages were sent back for reinforcements. With the darkness General Cuthbert had concentrated the greater part of his Brigade, and by midnight the men of Kent and Yorkshire had avenged their comrades and swept the woods and village clear of the enemy.

There was much hard fighting of this nature, especially with the First Corps, and in one or two places the Guards suffered badly before they could get to grips with the enemy. But once the machine-guns were beaten down, and our men got to close quarters, the Germans crumpled immediately and put up their hands.

With the Marne safely crossed the going was very much easier, and our men pushed ahead in splendid style. The country was far more open, and there were comparatively few of those awkward woods to be cleared. Thus a few lucky R.F.A. batteries were given a very cheery three or four days' work of a character which will probably never be known again in war. They were sent forward with the pursuing cavalry to manœuvre as Horse batteries, and harry the retiring Boche as much as possible. These were tactics which we had recently experienced at the hands of the enemy during the Retreat, and they had not been pleasant for us.



It is rather curious that we should so soon have had the opportunity of retaliating, and with excellent effect, despite the miserable weather and dreadful condition of the roads.

Looking back over those days of the Advance, and putting this and that together, I cannot help thinking that the Force accomplished very notable work; work such as should not be forgotten. For generations this great turning-point in the world's history will, I suppose, be discussed by critics and historians. We should have done this; the French ought to have done that; the Germans might have done so-and-so. In this volume no attempt is made to contribute to that discussion.<sup>44</sup> But there is one point which I would emphasise; one remark which I would make to the learned sages. Do not ignore the human element! The little flags which you pin into large-scale maps, the little wooden blocks which you manoeuvre as you would chessmen, these are in reality but men like you.

That tiny Force, although it held no more than a tenth part of that long 800-mile front, did the work allotted to it because the spirit of the men soared exultant above all difficulty and hardship. (It is not for me to speak of our French Allies.) You may move your pawns across the board and say, "by such an hour

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they should have been on such a line," but the pawns which you move are flesh and blood. The men had already achieved the incredible, and, knowing this, you ask why they did not continue to perform miracles.

At this time, with the exception of the 2,000 men already mentioned as reinforcements, the losses of the Force in men and guns had not been made good, despite the statement in the London Press of August 29 that they had. For instance, the Second Corps alone was 42 guns below its strength, or the equivalent of seven entire field batteries.

I cannot resist adding by way of comment the Press Bureau bulletin published in the *Times* of September 7, 1914 :

In all drafts amounting to 19,000 men have reached our army or are approaching them on the Lines of Communication, and advantage is being taken of the five quiet days (*sic*) that have passed since the action of September 1 to fill up the gaps and refit and consolidate the units.

This presumably referred to the Army in India, or to reinforcements being sent to France via the Cape of Good Hope. But the "five quiet days!"

If there must be criticism, let it be directed not against the Force, but against the politicians then in power who for seven long years

refused to listen to the men who warned them of what would certainly come to pass; who told them the actual month of the year when Germany would make her murderous attack.

The losses had not been made good as they should have been, and the fault did not lie with the military authorities. It was the war-worn veterans of two amazing weeks' campaigning who turned and drove back 60 miles over a 80-mile front an enemy vastly superior in numbers, in guns, in ammunition and in equipment, and it was the unconquerable pride of race which enabled them to do it.

## V

### A LITTLE MUSIC, AND A CHURCH PARADE

K. HEN. *'Tis good for men to love their present pains  
Upon example ; so the spirit is eased :  
And when the mind is quicken'd, out of doubt,  
The organs, though defunct and dead before,  
Break up their drowsy grave and newly move  
With casted slough and fresh legerity.*

A CERTAIN unit was temporarily held up during the Advance at a little village on the Marne. It chanced that they remained there for twenty-four hours. The men bedded-down in a couple of big barns while the C.O. found a room in the adjoining farm. In one of the rooms there was a little piano, and the C.O. hit upon the idea of giving the men a musical entertainment, or rather of helping them to give one.

Now the C.O. was Captain Eldridge (at his request I omit his real name), and Eldridge was a man with no small reputation as a musician, composer and elocutionist. He was, in fact, recognised as one of the finest living reciters of Dickens's "Christmas Carol," while as a lecturer he had been very popular in many parts of the world for some years past. This by way of introducing him.

The men were delighted with the idea ; the

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piano was soon carried out into the barn, some oil lamps and candles were secured, and Eldridge started in. The proceedings opened with some eight or nine rollicking choruses of popular songs, "Who's your lady friend," "Hold your hand out," "Everybody's doing it," and so on. But artfully sandwiched in were three or four of the old songs, "Heart of Oak," "Loch Lomond," and others.

Then Eldridge gave a little chat about the beauty and value of the old songs, the well-known ditties and the lesser-known folk songs, singing in illustration "Yarmouth is a pretty town," "The Golden Vanity," and others. The men were obviously amazed that such songs could have been created by the country-folk, and before the hour was up they were singing "Golden Vanity" as though they had known it all their lives. And it was a fact, as the lecturer pointed out to them, that the songs which they had sung the best were the old English ones.

This incident seems worth recording for two reasons, apart from its comment on the old tag about "not being a musical nation." One is that the little entertainment was the first given to the men on active service during the war; and that it was from this and subsequent ones, with some stirring lectures on phases of the war given by Eldridge, that the authorities came to realise the vital importance of this form of ~~entertainment~~.

tion for the men. Hence came the organisation of regular concert parties by Miss Lena Ashwell and of frequent tours of the "front" by well-known artists.

The second point of interest is that it shows one side of the work which the "Naval and Military Musical Union" has been doing for several years past in the two Services. The value of good music for our fighting men has never been properly and officially recognised. Thus, as usual, it was left for private enterprise to show the way. I believe that General Smith-Dorrien (who, by the way, is President of the Union) begged hard that some of the military bands might be sent to France in the early days. Eventually, after many weary months, some were sent, and immediately they had the fine, tonic effect on the men which he knew would be the case. Who can ever forget the immortal story of Major Tom Bridges collecting the stragglers in St. Quentin and marching them away to the tune of "The British Grenadiers," played on a penny whistle and toy drum?

No, you cannot beat the fine old land- and sea-songs for the men to sing. And once they know them the men are in full agreement. As Eldridge remarked, "I am quite ready to play ragtime by the hour for the boys to sing, but it was 'Heart of Oak' which beat our lads to quarters for the battle of Trafalgar."

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Nor can I resist recording another incident which happened the next day, a Sunday. It looked as though a move would not be made until the afternoon, and as this was the first opportunity since Mons, Eldridge paraded the men and asked if they would like to have a Church Parade service. There was no mistake about the enthusiastic response, and so the Roman Catholics fell out to a flank and were marched off to a tiny church for 10 o'clock Mass, while the Church of England party filed in to the barn where the piano was.

This was the order of Service; and again, unless I am mistaken, it was the first Church Parade service held in the Force since they had landed on French soil:—

General Confession: Lord's Prayer: Preces and Responses: Hymn, "O God, our Help in Ages Past": Lesson from the Old Testament, where Jonathan and his armour-bearer go up against the Philistines: Hymn, "Rock of Ages" (by general request): Prayers, (a) the noble supplication used every morning in the Navy, "O Eternal Lord God, Who alone spreadest out the heavens" (but specially adapted that day to the Army), (b) two other suitable prayers: Hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers": National Anthem.

It may be added that there were only two prayer- and hymn-books available, one of which

Eldridge had to use, but never, so he told me, had he heard the hymns and National Anthem sung with deeper feeling or enthusiasm.

The Service was repeated, by general request, three Sundays later, when opportunity presented itself, at the Aisne. This time the men, some 800 strong, formed up on open ground in three sides of a square. There was no piano and again only two spare hymn-books. But the congregation made a brave effort over the hymns, and, at least, they knew the National Anthem. And all the while the great guns thundered through the valley. There was no padre to take the Service, but I am inclined to think that it owed much of its effect upon the men to the fact that it was their own C.O. who laid with them their offering of prayer and thanksgiving before the Throne of the Almighty.

I have often been asked about the attitude of the men generally towards religion and spiritual matters, and I have found it very difficult to give an adequate reply. Englishmen have a natural reluctance to speak about such things, and if there is one who does he appears to be regarded with suspicion. After all, it is by noble example rather than by precept that a man wins the confidence and esteem of his fellows in the matter of religion, and active service must inevitably bring out all that is best in the



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man. If an officer has shown his command that he is a *man* and an English gentleman in the best sense of the word, the rest naturally follows.

There is an old proverb, "Let him who knows not how to pray go to sea." And in this is war like the sea, for both must needs engender prayer in a man. I do not believe that any man can be an atheist in the daily presence of death. The faith in a Supreme Being, the trust in the efficacy of prayer, may not be apparent to his comrades, but it is there, none the less, hidden deep in the heart of a man.

During the opening month there was practically no opportunity for officers and men to partake of the "most comfortable Sacrament" of the Holy Communion, but so soon as it was possible to hold the Service in various commands the response to the summons was almost overwhelming. And the same conditions were always to be seen at the Base on the eve of a draft's departure for the "front."

But if the ghostly comfort of the Church Service and the ministrations of a priest were denied them, when through the welter of battle there was no time for thought or prayer, may we not say with perfect sincerity that the men made of their great work a prayer? Who is it will deny that the self-sacrificing devotion of men for their comrades, the succour of wounded under fire, the pity and help extended to the

country-folk, even the rescue of dumb animals—who will deny that prayers such as those were not more acceptable to God than the “words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts”?

And there was another aspect. I can best indicate it by an example. One night I had to look after a man who was badly hit and suffering agony. There was no doctor available, and in the meantime I dosed him with opium to relieve the pain. After a little while he tried to get at his pocket. Helping him, I found a letter and placed it in his hand.

“It’s all right, sir,” he replied, “number’s not up yet——” Then in a minute or so, “Mother—says—she’s praying for me—read letter.”

I read the letter as he asked, but the words are too sacred to set down. The man pulled through safely, partly, perhaps, owing to a splendid constitution, but mainly, I think, because he willed to live, supremely confident that the old mother’s prayer must be granted.

This incident must have been just one of hundreds like it. The men did not talk of such things save, perhaps, in an extreme case like that one. But when they did it was always with a perfect simplicity which carried immediate conviction. People at home, bishops and clergymen, used to assert with professional

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pride that there was a great spiritual revival with the Army in the field. They suggested that the teachings of the Church were responsible for the awakening. The padres working with the troops knew better. Just as the war has altered our outlook on the material life, so has it extended and transformed our vista of the spiritual. And one thing, at least, is certain, the time has come when our dignitaries of the Church must needs set their house in order, for "our sons have shown us God."

I think there can have been few men in the Force who did not realise, even if it were but dimly, that the prayers of their loved ones and of the people at home followed them. Nor were those prayers without avail. In all the works of R. L. Stevenson there is no passage of finer truth and comfort than the one in which he asserts that a generous prayer is never presented in vain. "The petition," he writes, "may be refused, but the petitioner is always, I believe, rewarded by some gracious visitation." It is those at home who have the harder part, for the mental torture and suspense is infinitely greater than mere physical discomfort, greater even than wounds and disablement. Perhaps in the confidence that their prayers are not in vain there may be for those loved ones something of comfort, something of that "gracious visitation."

## VI

### WITH THE FLYING CORPS

K. HEN. *Therefore let our proportions for these wars  
Be soon collected, and all things thought upon  
That may with reasonable swiftness add  
More feathers to our wings.*

IN all the departments of our fighting Services, hardly one of which has not been completely revolutionised since the outbreak of the war, no developments are more astonishing than those which have taken place in the Air Services. It seems only yesterday that Blériot made the first cross-Channel flight and so brought great headlines into the daily papers, "England no more an Island"; "Threat to our Island Supremacy," and such-like nonsense. To-day our men fly backwards and forwards over the Dover Straits as regularly as an infantry battalion goes on a route march. In the first year of the war there was accomplished in invention and flight more than could have been dreamed of in ten years of peace.

It is well that we should occasionally remind ourselves, and our Allies and neighbours, of facts like these. We are far too modest over our

nation's achievements, and since we so constantly belittle and criticise ourselves we can hardly be surprised that our friends and enemies should take us at our own valuation.

At Mons and during the Retreat, as far as the Aisne, in fact, the R.F.C. was represented by four little aeroplane squadrons, Nos. 2, 8, 4 and 5. This meant about 60 machines, and the number averaged about the same until well into 1915. This was due to the fact that we lost so many machines in the earlier months, and the authorities were hard put to it merely to replace them without building additions. But it was not the number of aeroplanes which counted, it was the skill of the pilots and observers. And in this the R.F.C. has been second to none.

In those early days of which I write aeroplane work was in its infancy; no one seemed to realise its actual value, and certainly hardly a man can have foreseen those wonderful developments in the new arm which were so speedily to be in force. One looks back at the old days of peace manœuvres, trekking about on Salisbury Plain or through the Essex flats, and remembers how suspiciously one regarded aircraft. Co-operation between aircraft and guns, now of the first importance, was then hardly more than hinted at, and signalling was of the most cumbersome description, sheets or large flags spread out on the ground, and so forth.